



Security Council

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Letter dated 15 August 2013 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Germany to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to transmit to you a letter dated 15 August 2013 from the representative of the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces, in advance of the debate of the Security Council on the "Protection of civilians", which is to be held on 19 August 2013 (see annex).

I should be grateful if you could have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Christophe Eick
Chargé d'affaires a.i.



Annex to the letter dated 15 August 2013 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Germany to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour, on behalf of the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces, to refer to the open debate of the Security Council on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, to be held on 19 August 2013.

All States have a fundamental obligation to protect their civilians. This is a central pillar of international humanitarian law and human rights law, which has been regularly confirmed by the Security Council. In February 2013, the Security Council noted that "States bear the primary responsibility to protect civilians as well as respect and ensure the human rights of all individuals within their territory and subject to their jurisdiction ..." (S/PRST/2013/2).

For the past 29 months, the Syrian regime has chosen to ignore its basic duty to protect its people and has instead systematically engaged in a campaign of indiscriminate violence against its own population in its attempts to suppress a popular uprising calling for democratic reform. This has caused the displacement and widespread suffering of millions of Syrians, who continue to be vulnerable to regime attacks.

The Syrian regime has repeatedly demonstrated a blatant disregard for civilian life and the laws and customs of war. Contrary to Security Council resolution 1894 (2009), which demands "that parties to armed conflict comply strictly with the obligations applicable to them under international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law ...", the Syrian regime has systematically targeted innocent civilians and bombarded densely populated areas with heavy weaponry. These actions represent a direct violation of Syria's international commitments, as also defined by the four Geneva Conventions of 1949, their two additional protocols of 1977, the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907, as well as international human rights law.

The most devastating way in which the Syrian regime has failed to fulfil its obligations to its people has been its persistent denial of humanitarian access to Syria's vulnerable groups. The provision of humanitarian access is critical in situations of armed conflict where civilians are in urgent need of what is often life-saving assistance.

Since April 2011, the Syrian regime has consistently failed to fulfil its international obligations and has instead denied humanitarian access to civilians in towns and villages throughout Syria. In the past year, regime forces have laid siege upon Homs, Aleppo, al-Qusayr, al-Shajarah and Daraa, preventing tens of thousands of civilians from accessing basic necessities, such as drinking water, food and medical care.

The United Nations Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic has documented these actions, stating that, "Such sieges appear calculated to render living conditions unbearable, forcing civilians to flee and exposing anti-government armed group fighters as military targets" (A/HRC/23/58). Checkpoints controlled by the regime have proliferated, significantly impeding the delivery of cross-line humanitarian aid. Moreover, the regime has targeted medical personnel and hospitals, while denying medical access to those in urgent need of care.

The crimes committed by the regime's forces have repeatedly been condemned by the international community. In July 2013, the Security Council itself called upon the Syrian regime "to allow immediate, safe and unhindered access, in accordance with the United Nations guiding principles of humanitarian assistance, for relevant humanitarian, including United Nations, actors, to reach civilians" in places under siege by Syrian forces (SC/11028).

Despite this, the Syrian regime has refused to cooperate to improve humanitarian access and stop the suffering of its people. As Under-Secretary-General and Emergency Relief Coordinator Valerie Amos informed the Security Council on 16 July 2013, the Syrian regime has repeatedly "rejected" the calls of the Security Council and continues to deny humanitarian organizations regular, consistent and unimpeded access to millions of vulnerable Syrians. It is clear that more must urgently be done to improve the humanitarian situation in Syria.

The Syrian Coalition therefore encourages the consideration of all measures that can improve the protection of civilians as well as enhance humanitarian access and hold actors that violate international law accountable. The Coalition remains firmly committed to abiding by international humanitarian law and stands ready to provide any access throughout the liberated territories of Syria to provide much needed aid to our people.

In anticipation of the upcoming debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, the Syrian Coalition urges the Security Council to act without delay to improve humanitarian access in Syria, and to authorize the delivery of cross-border humanitarian aid. We also urge the Security Council to increase pressure on the Syrian regime to permit humanitarian operations and give unimpeded access to civilians in need throughout the country, including the free passage of medical supplies.

The Syrian Coalition recognizes that a political solution is needed to end the destruction of Syria and to comprehensively improve the humanitarian situation in Syria. Until such a solution is reached, however, we encourage the Security Council to take all possible measures to help protect and alleviate the suffering of millions of Syrians and to compel the Syrian regime to end its systematic targeting of Syrian civilians.

(Signed) Najib Ghadbian
United Nations Representative of the Syrian Coalition